

Message Text

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SUBJECT: USINFO: SYMPOSIUM ON AFRICAN RELIGIONS

REUR P 102138Z

INTRO: A ONE-WEEK SYMPOSIUM ON AFRICAN RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY ENDED FRIDAY IN KINSHASA. OUR CORRESPONDENT IN ZAIRE FILED THE FOLLOWING STORY AFTER TALKING WITH PROFESSOR MASAMBA, DEAN OF THE ZAIRE PROTESTANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, AND ONE OF THE SYMPOSIUM'S LEADERS.

TEST: REPRESENTATIVES FROM NINE COUNTRIES AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS WERE PRESENT IN THE ZAIRIAN CAPITAL FOR THIS, THE ELEVENTH SYMPOSIUM SINCE 1961, TO RE-EVALUATE THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL AFRICAN BELIEFS IN CHRISTIANITY. DEAN MASAMBA EXPLAINED THAT PAST PRACTICE HAS BEEN TO TAKE ELEMENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH TO ENRICH TRADITIONAL AFRICAN RELIGIONS, BUT THESE SYMPOSIA HOPED TO SHOW THAT TRADITIONAL CUSTOMS COULD BE A NEW VOICE FOR CHRISTIANITY.

"WE BELIEVE THAT GOD WAS ALSO REVEALING HIMSELF THROUGH OUR ANCESTRAL BELIEFS AND THAT CHRIST CAME NOT TO DESTROY OUR RELIGIONS, BUT TO SAY TO THE WORLD THAT GOD WAS THERE," THE UNCLASSIFIED

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DEAN EXPLAINED.

ASKED FOR EXAMPLES OF THE MANNER IN WHICH AFRICAN TRADITIONS MIGHT ENRICH CHRISTIANITY, THE PROFESSOR POINTED OUT THAT AFRICANS TRADITIONALLY SEE LIFE IN A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL MANNER. "WESTERN CIVILIZATION IS A LITTLE TOO MUCH ORIENTED TO THE INDIVIDUAL, WHEREAS IN THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL BELIEFS, THE INDIVIDUAL BELIEVES STRONGLY IN THE COMMUNITY." THE DEAN ALSO POINTED OUT

THAT THE AFRICAN CANNOT SEPARATE LIFE INTO RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR, BUT THAT RELIGION IS VERY SEPARATE FROM LIFE IN THE WEST.

"AND WE ALSO BELIEVE THAT GOD IS PRESENT IN EVERYTHING, AND THAT HE HAS GIVEN EVERYTHING A SPECIFIC POWER THAT CAN BE HEALING. SO SOME OF THE PRACTICES, LIKE MASKS, OR PEOPLE WEARING(A CHARM) -- PRACTICES THAT HAVE BEEN CALLED FETTERISM OR PAGANISM -- (ARE REALLY) THE WAY THE AFRICANS SEE THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN EVERYTHING, SO THAT IN THE WHOLE AREA OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE WE HAVE TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND THE POWER THAT GOD HAS GIVEN TO EVERYTHING."

DEAN MASAMBA SAID THAT AFTER SIMILAR SYMPOSIA LAST YEAR IN DAR ES SALAAM AND ACCRA, AN ASSOCIATION OF THIRD-WORLD THEOLOGICALS WAS ESTABLISHED TO PURSUE THIS ISSUE FURTHER. HE SAID OTHER SYMPOSIA WILL BE MEETING "IN THE NEAR FUTURE" TO DISCUSS DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THIS VERY INTERESTING QUESTION. END ITEM.

NEW ITEM FOR IBS: THIRTEEN AND ONE-HALF MINUTE TAPED INTERVIEW BETWEEN AIO ROSE AND MASAMBA, FROM WHICH ABOVE WAS EXCERPTED, BEING SENT OFFICIAL AIR THIS WEEK IN CASE YOU PREFER TO USE IT IN THAT FORMAT. REGARDS. DUMAS

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